

Message Text

SECRET

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44

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15

CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 MC-02 ACDA-07 /053 W
----- 083856

P R 151610Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2411

INFO SECDEF WASHDC

USCINCEUR

CINCUSNAVEUR

S E C R E T TUNIS 2677

USCINCEUR AND CINCUSNAVEUR ALSO FOR POLADS

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MASS, TS

SUBJECT: ACTING MINISTER OF DEFENSE BENNOUR'S CONCERNS OVER
MILITARY CAPABILITY

REF: TUNIS 2565, 2631

1. AS NOTED REFTELS, SPECIFIC EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN IN
LAST FEW DAYS OVER STATE OF READINESS OF TUNISIAN ARMED
FORCES HAVE EMANATED FROM DEPUTY MINISTER OF DEFENSE AHMED
BENNOUR. WE EXPRESSED HOPE (TUNIS 2565) WE COULD GET
BETTER READING ON AUTHORITY WITH WHICH BENNOUR SPEAKING.
WE FELT THIS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT SINCE THERE HAVE BEEN
INDICATIONS IN THE PAST OF TENSIONS BETWEEN BENNOUR AND
DEFENSE MINISTER KHEFACHA, WHO FOR MONTHS RUMORED TO BE IN
ILL HEALTH. WE HAVE NOW LEARNED CONFIDENTIALLY THAT KHEFACHA
IS HOSPITALIZED IN PARIS AND POSSIBLY GRAVELY ILL. THIS
MEANS THAT BENNOUR, ALTHOUGH UNANNOUNCED AS SUCH, IS FOR
ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES MINISTER OF DEFENSE. WE BELIEVE
DEPARTMENT SHOULD KEEP THIS IN MIND IN CONSIDERING HOW
WE MAY WANT TO RESPOND TO BENNOUR REQUEST FOR OFFICIAL
ANSWER ON HAWK MISSILES OR TO OTHER REQUESETS FOR MILITARY
ASSISTANCE. EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT, IN GENERAL, OUR POSTURE

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IN THIS SITUATION SHOULD BE BUSINESS AS USUAL, BEING

PARTICULARLY ALERT TO RESPOND QUICKLY TO TUNISIAN REQUESTS WHERE WE CAN DO SO WITHOUT MAKING ANY NEW COMMITMENTS, BUT AT SAME TIME NOT SENDING WRONG MESSAGE INADVERTENTLY BY SILENCE VIS-A-VIS BENNOUR REQUEST FOR OFFICIAL ANSWER ON HAWKS.

2. TO EXTENT TUNISIAN DEFENSE CONCERNS ARE PURSUED HERE RATHER THAN IN WASHINGTON, WE WILL PROBABLY HAVE TO DEAL DIRECTLY WITH BENNOUR. FROM PAST EXPERIENCE WE EXPECT MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS TIS TOTALLY IN THE DARK ON THESE MILITARY MATTERS (WITH EXCEPTION OF FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI AS MEMBER GOT INNER COUNCILS) AND MINISTRY OF INTERIOR HAS LITTLE COMMUNICATION WITH DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT. IT WOULD THEREFORE BE USEFUL TO HAVE DEPARTMENT GUIDANCE FOR USE WITH BENNOUR ON "AS NEEDED" BASIS. (IN THIS REGARD WE SHOULD KEEP IN MIND THAT GOT WILL PROBABLY FOR TIME BEING TRY TO KEEP SECRET, PARTICULARLY FROM LIBYANS, FACT THAT MINISTER OF DEFENSE KHEFACHA INCAPACITATED.)
KING

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NNN

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